



THE
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By Mr. T O W N,

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Facundi calices quem non fecere disertum! HOR.



S I am willing to do every thing in my power to celebrate so illustrious a body as the *Robin Hood* Society, I have taken the first opportunity of laying the following letter before the public.

To Mr. T O W N.

S I R,

THAT part of your last paper, in which you considered the Art of Speaking as far as it regards theatrical performances, gives me reason to hope that you will not overlook the merits of the *Robin Hood* Society, where that Art is practised in it's greatest perfection. You would do well to recommend it to the gentlemen of the theatre to attend those weekly meetings for their improve-

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ment as often as possible; and I dare say you will join with me in giving the same advice to the younger part of our clergy and our lawyers, as well as our members of parliament. The stage, the pulpit, the bar, and the senate-house cannot furnish us with such glorious examples of the power of Oratory, as are to be met with in this society; where the most important questions in every branch of knowledge are discussed, and where the disputants are all of them equally versed in religion, law, politics, and the drama.

THE institution of this School of Eloquence far exceeds any thing that the ancients could boast. Every sect, that was known among the *Grecians* and *Romans*, has it's votaries here also. I have seen a taylor a *Stoic*, a shoemaker a *Platonist*, and a cook an *Epicurean*. They affect to entertain a profound veneration for *Socrates*, often preferring him to any of the Apostles: but instead of declaring with that wise philosopher that they know nothing, the members of the *Robin Hood* Society profess to know every thing.

FOR my own part, I confess myself so charmed with their proceedings, that I constantly attend them: and when I see all their members assembled with each his pewter mug before him, I cannot help preferring this social meeting to any ancient *Symposium* whatever; and when I further observe them first take a swig, and then speak with such amazing force of argument, I am apt to conclude that truth, instead of being hid in a well (as was said by an old philosopher) must lay at the bottom of a tankard of porter.

THERE is no grace or excellence in Oratory, but is displayed in the *Robin Hood* Society to the greatest advantage. *Demosthenes* being asked what was the first quality in an orator, replied—action; what the second,—action; what the

the third,—action. Upon this principle one of the members, for whom I have a vast respect, is the greatest orator that ever lived. He never troubles himself about the order or substance of what he delivers, but waves his hand, tosses his head, abounds in several new and beautiful gestures, and from the beginning of his speech to the end of it takes no care but to set it off with action. *Tully* tells us, that it is the business of an orator “to prove, delight, and convince.” Proof and conviction our Society is always sure to give us; for else how could it ever come to pass, that so many young men should have learned from these disquisitions, that there is no God, that the soul is mortal, that religion is a jest, and many other truths, which they would otherwise never have discovered. The nature of their questions is also for the most part so entertaining, that the disputes about them cannot fail of giving delight: and there is a peculiarity in the oratory of the place, which greatly conduces to that end. The speakers do not always think themselves obliged to drive in the dull direct road to the point, but indulge themselves in a larger scope that allows room for novelty and entertainment. When the question has been concerning the veracity of the bible, I have known a gentleman get up, and beginning with *William* the Conqueror give the audience an abstract of as many reigns, as his five minutes would allow him to dispatch. I lately remember the question to have been “Whether a bridge from *Black Fryars* to *Southwark* would be of public benefit;” when a facetious gentleman employed himself in demonstrating the great utility of the bridge of the nose, and the bridge of a fiddle. In a word, our orators are at once serious and comical; and they make gravity and mirth almost constantly attend each other, like their own *Robin Hood* and *Little John*. The solidity, and at the same time the smartness of
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their speeches, are equally remarkable. They pun with a grave face, and make quibbles and conundrums with the air of a philosopher. The writings of different authors have been compared to wines: but the orations delivered here can be resembled to nothing so properly as the liquors of the Society; for while they are at once so weighty and so sharp, they seem to be an equal mixture of porter and lemonade.

It would be endless to enumerate the advantages resulting from this Society: The wonderful improvement it has already made in our mechanics is very evident: It calls off our tradesmen from the *practice* of honesty in their common dealings, and sets them upon *enquiries* concerning right and wrong, and the moral fitness of things. The SPECTATOR has told us of the rhetoric of a toyman: but you, Mr. TOWN, might acquaint posterity of the eloquence of bakers, barbers, carpenters, and blacksmiths: you may every day hear discourses on religion from the shopboard, and researches into philosophy from behind the counter. When you took notice of the want of learning in our people of quality, you ought in justice to have acknowledged the amazing erudition of our tradesmen. The Plebeians of *Rome* were mere brutes to our common people; and I am of opinion that the public room under that in which this weekly meeting is held, instead of being furnished with the busts of our *English* poets, should be adorned with the heads of the learned shoemakers, tallow-chandlers, bakers, &c. that constitute this excellent Society.

We may venture to say that the Royal Society and the *Robin Hood* Society are the two greatest ornaments of this nation: and as the former now and then give us an account of their transactions, it were to be wished that the fellows
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of the latter would also from time to time oblige us with an history of their proceedings. We should then see by what means so many proselytes have been made from bigotry and superstition; by what degrees a young disputant from a raw Christian ripens into a deist, from a deist into a freethinker, and from a freethinker (by a very short step) into an atheist. We should also know the effect, that the disputations at this weekly meeting has upon our lives and conversations; and from thence judge how much a design of this nature deserves public encouragement. I have here flung together a short account of some of the former members, and upon a review of it cannot but lament that it seems to be the peculiar fate of great orators, such as *Demosthenes* and *Tully* for example, to come to an unhappy end.

Mat. Prig, a Merchant's Clerk, was converted from Christianity by the arguments which were brought against Revelation.

Aaron Ben Saddi was converted from the Jewish Faith by the arguments brought against *Moses* and the Patriarchs.

Will. Positive was a strong fatalist, and at the same time a vehement advocate for man's free will. At last he gave a proof of his free agency by shooting himself through the head.

Jack Wildfire was convinced of the innocence of fornication, used to declaim against the absurd institution of matrimony, and at twenty six died a batchelor in the Lock Hospital.

Solomon Square stood up for the religion of nature, and the immutable rule of right and wrong in preference to the laws of the community. However, he was unfortunately detected in an attempt to carry off a silver tankard from the bar of the house, and was sent to propagate morality in foreign parts.

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Bob Booty was a strict *Hobbian*, and maintained that men were in a natural state, with each other. He at last died a martyr to these principles, and now hangs on a gibbet on *Hounslow Heath*.

John Dismal, after having argued one night against the being of a God, and the immortality of the soul, went home, and was found the next morning hanging in his garters.

Thomas Broadcloth, Citizen and Mercer, was very much admired for his speeches upon trade. After he had been in business for two years, he became bankrupt, and was indicted for felony in secreting his effects.

Richard Goosequill, Attorney at Law, was remarkable for his patriotism and the love of this country. He was convicted of bribery and corruption in a late election, in which he was employed as an agent.

Jeremy Crispin, Cordwainer, used constantly to attend the club for edification, though he was forced from time to time to pawn his own and his wife's cloaths to raise the weekly six-pence for his admittance. In the space of three years he had been a Papist, a Quaker, an Anabaptist, a Jew, an Arrian, a Socinian, a Mahometan, a Methodist, a Deist, and an Atheist. His wife and four children have been sent to the workhouse. He is at present confined in *Bedlam*, and calls himself the President of the *Robin Hood Society*.

I am, Sir,

Your humble Servant, &c.